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ABSTRACT

The primary argument of this paper is that student political attitudes are a function of historical and politcal inputs acting on their attitudinal structure. Around 1970 the proportion of students supporting leftist causes reached a peak and began declining. Attitude surveys among students at the University of Oregon in 1970 and at Arizona State University in 1973 indicated this change in student attitudes while representing the inherent differences between the two schools. If the structure of student attitudes remains constant, the political effects of Watergate will increase student support for leftist causes. A new factor, and one that may change the attitudinal structure somewhat, is the declining level of disagreement between parents and students. Since disagreement with parents is closely related with support for demonstrations, declining disagreement with parents suggests that an increase in support among students for leftist causes may not be associated with the traditional forms of student activism. (Author/DE)

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STUDENTS' REACTIONS TO WATERGATE

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Students' Reaction to Watergate

What effect might the current crisis in government have on the perspective of college students? This question is immense, but may usefully be approached by looking at the structure of attitudes among college students separately from historical and political events that are inputs to that structure. Among the significant inputs are the Vietnam war, the reactions of the public to campus political movements, and Nixon's election and re-election. The structure of attitudes is reflected in the observation that people who were against the war in Vietnam were also against racism, for equal rights for women, against police control in the community, and convinced that government and big business ran the country. This attitudinal structure has been fairly stable over the past few years, though the proportion of students subscribing to it has fluctuated. One way of looking at the stable structure of attitudes is to see it as an indicator of class consciousness among the educated future employees of the corporate state. (Mankoff and Flacks, 1971) Another view is that the structure could be predicted by theories of cognitive consistency. No position on these issues is taken here.

The primary argument of this paper is that the structure of attitudes has fairly stable over the past few years and that the proportion of students that subscribe to positions critical of the status quo is a function of the historical and political inputs acting upon the attitudinal structure. Around 1970 the proportion of students supporting leftist causes reached a peak and began declining. 1974 may be another turn-around period, where theproportion subscribing to this view begins climbing again due to the inputs of Watergate.

The public's support for positions critical of government is a new factor in predicting the student reaction. Student movements of the late 60's were oppositional. Since some opinions of the public have reached or exceeded the level of alienation and opposition exhibited by the earlier student activists, it is difficult to say what effect this might have on a new student movement. As the analysis will show, disagreement with parents on political matters went along with participation and support of demonstrations and the level of disagreement is likely to decline. On the other hand, another component of the radical perspective, that governemtn is corrupt, is supported. Hence prediction of the direction of a new student movement is difficult.

Recent background of student activism.

The effect of the Vietnam war on students has been extensively analyzed (Useem 1973). Mankoff and Flacks (1971) show that the opposition to the war began in an elite group that was readily distinguished from the rest of the college students. Their religious background tended to be Jewish or liberal Protestant. Their parents were upper middle class professionals who lived in an urban environment and had high educational attainment.

This group was reacting quite differently to the war than the general public. The main themes of the student activist opposition to Vietnam were the horrors of war and the hypocrisy of the Presidents talking peace and continuing escalation. More radical elements among the activists talked of the collusion between big business, the military, and government as a part of a plan for the military dominance and economic exploi tation

of Southeast Asia.

At the same time the public was not responding to any of these themes. Non-college working youth resented the political activism and activities of their priviledged peers and supported Wallace or Nixon. The parents of college age youth, primarily middle class and college educated, were the most hawkish social grouping at the time. Non-college sources of opposition to the Vietnam war existed in the 60 and over age group and among people with little education. (Rosenberg et al, 1970) These groups were never reached by the student anti-war movement because they had different reasons for opposition to the war. The old and poorly educated opposed the war because it was in a distant part of the world and unrelated to their interests and because of its cost. The moral concerns of college students did not speak to those who opposed the war on pragmatic grounds; indeed, the pragmatists' opposition to the war had to overcome their dislike of the student radicals. Because of the differences between the public's view of the war and the student activists' view, the anti-war movement failed to move off campus.

The end of the movement may have occured because of the cyclic nature of all social movements, but the political event that certainly sealed the fate of activism on campus was the re-election of Nixon. His landslide victory signaled the repudiation by the public of all the political goals the student activists had supported. Student activists were reminded by the election of Nixon that they were inherently powerless. Their brief political alliance with McCarthy was rebuffed in Chicago, but in a way that reaffirmed the basic convictions of the movement; politics was corrupt and violent, and the people would not

have an opportunity to express their desires.

The next representative of the antiwar position, McGovern, overcame machine politics. But the public finally demonstrated to the student activists what the "generation gap" was all about. Nixon, whose roots are in the old politics and the cold war, won by a landslide. The rhetoric ofthe student activists had always referred to the people and the people had spoken. It was the end of the student movement because it demonstrated the powerlessness of students to change public opinion or to affect the political system in the direction of their desires.

Changes in the attitudes of students to 1971

The visible signs of student activism have disappeared and many of the well-known leaders have turned to other pursuits, from strange religions to g.aduate school. Table One illustrates the changes that have been occuring in student attitudes over the past few years. Since the University of Oregon has a liberal arts and science emphasis in addition to existing in a more liberal political environment than Arizona State University, which has a large business and engineering college, it is no surprise that there are differences between the two universities. For example, the ASU student body with 36% Republicans is probably unusual for any large public university. The differences between the 1970 Oregon data and the 1973 ASU data are thus due in part to inherent differences between the two universities as well as the changes in student attitudes over the three year period.

The best evidence for the increasing conservatism of students is found in Yankelovich's (1972) surveys of student opinion from 1968 to April, 1971.

This study shows that a wide variety of opinions associated with leftist political views reached a peak in 1970 and declined in 1971. For example, 41% of the nationwide sample of students in 1970 agreed that "The war in Vietnam is pure imperialism," but in 1971 24% agreed with this statement. In 1970, 14% of the students identified with th "New Left"; this proportion declined to 11% in 1971. Perhaps the most indicative measure of the decline of leftist opinions is that students themselves saw campus radicalism as declining. In 1970, 33% saw campus radicalism leveling off or declining; this had increased to 55% in 1971. (Yankelovich, 1972, p. 217) Concurrent with the decline in activist attitudes, students showed increased concern over career, money, and security. For example, the proportion of students indicating the security of a job was important to them rose from 33% in 1970 to 44% in 1971. (p. 47)

Since 1971 to the beginning of the Watergate period, I assume that student opinions have become increasingly conservative as the effect of public opposition to students made itself felt. The declining war, the end of the draft, and the depressing effect of a colorless cold-war president has also contributed to the increased conservatism of college students.

The structure of student attitudes

Figures One and Two show how some of the relevant attitudes are linked at the two universities. The figures demonstrate a great deal of similarity in structure to visual inspection. Beginning with liberalism, which is #1 on both figures, one can readily see that points 5,20,9 and 2 above 1 and 15, 18, 19, -8 and -3 below 1 have nearly the same

relationship despite the differences in the two universities. The points mentioned correspond to the number of times the student has demonstrated against the war, finding other reasons for college than pursuit of a career, support of women's liberation, disagreement with parents on political matters, disadvantages of the corporate system, perception that our government is not democratic, and that a few people at the top or big businessmen run the country, that the quality of life has been damaged by the corporate system, and finally, that hard work does not get one ahead. These attitudes tend to form the liberal core of the structure of attitudes.

There are minor differences in attitude structure between the two universities. The biggest difference is item 4, the student's estimate of the number of his fellow students that would turn out for a demonstration against a new military incursion in a foreign country. At Oregon in 1970, liberals tended to estimate more students would turn out than conservatives; at ASU, it is the other way around with conservatives estimating greater participation. (Since the plots were created by factor analysis, when the angle between two points from the origin is less than 90 degrees, the variables are positively correlated. If the angle is greater than 90 degrees, the correlation is negative. Changing the signs on both axis reflects the point to the other side and is equivalent to multiplying the variable by -1.)The difference may be due simply to the greater familiarity of the liberals with the intentions ofthe left activists; their predictions are more accurate than the conservatives.

Another difference that is interesting is that anit-scientific attitudes were more closely linked with liberal attitudes at Oregon in

1970 than at ASU in 1973. In fact, items that measure attitudes toward science (10, 12, 13, 14 and 17) tend to be orthogonal to the liberal items at ASU, while at Oregon they tend to be linked, particularly 13 which indicates acceptance of astrology as a predictor of one's character and future. In other words, students that were leftist and tended to participate in demonstrations also tended to believe astrology had something to offer in predicting their own futures.

To what extent would a factor analysis of these items on a national sample reveal the same structure? There are two reasons supporting the generalization of the structure of attitudes in figures one and two to all students. The first is that similar structure was found in two universities that differ in important characteristics. As pointed out earlier, ASU exists in a conservative political climate and has a high proportion of business and engineering students while the U of O exists in a relatively liberal political climate. A second and equally important difference is the three years intervening between the two samples. During this period the Vietnam war seemed to slow down and Nixon was re-elected, two important inputs to the level of support students have for liberal causes. These changes have not had much effect, however, on attitudinal structure. In summary, differences in attitudinal structure between ASU and the U of O could most plausibly be attributed to differences between the two universities and time; similarities in structure in two disparate circumstances tends to support the conclusion that this structure of attitudes is representative of all students.

A second reason supporting the generality and importance of the structure of attitudes shown by figures one and two is that the items are from different content areas, that is, attitudes toward science,

parents, career, demonstrations, government, and business. A consistent factor structure is easy to build into a questionnaire by simply including many items with similar content. The factor that explains most of the variance will simply be composed of the content area with the largest number of items. The factor analysis is then only reporting the fact that people tend to use language consistently and that they vary with respect to their agreement with the items.

Predicting changes in student attitudes.

The factor analyses show that as a student changes his position on any item in a cluster, he tends to change on all others in that cluster, but not on items orthogonal (at 90 degrees) to it. Thus, a student who begins to believe that demonstrations are ineffective, or that working outside the party system is ineffective, will also tend to see himself as becoming more conservative and will also take a more favorable view of business and government. Attitudes toward science, at least for ASU, will not be affected by changes in a student*s political position; science for ASU students is an orthogonal attitude and is unrelated to political position.

The factor analyses suggest that student attitudes may have changed because the negative inputs from the public and the political process depressed the student*s acceptance of activist tactics. Because of the linkages between tactics and other components of liberalism, students have become more conservative in several areas,e.g., those discussed in the section on attitude structure.

Following this line of reasoning predictions of future changes in

student attitudes can also be developed. Assuming the same attitudinal structure is maintained over the next few years, predictions about changes in attitudinal levels can be made by looking at the dominant input into the student perspective (i.e., Watergate) and its most likely effect on attitudinal levels. Items 18 and 19 indicate the extent to which students believe this country is run democratically with everyone having equal say, or, conversely, that the country is run by a military and business elite. It is the latter point of view that is being reinforced by the Watergate revelations. Students whose beliefs move in the direction of the power elite model will tend also to change most on those attitudes closest to this belief. This means that students who move in the direction of the power elite model of government will also tend to believe that hard work does not guarantee success (# 3), that big business has damaged the quality of life (#-8), and they will become less conservative (#1). Attitudes toward the effectiveness of demonstrations and participation in demonstrations and disagreement with parents are somewhat farther away from the power elite items and hence will not change as much.

Another factor in predicting changes in student attitudes is the change in attitudes of the public toward Nixon. It will be difficult for most students to find a great deal of opposition to Nixon's impeachment at home; thus the level of disagreement with parents (# 2) on key political matters will decline. The factor analysis shows that disagreement with parents is very close to the students' support of demonstrations, both their effectiveness (#-16) and their actual participation (# 5) as well as the view that political action outside the party system is

effective (# 7). Thus, decreasing disagreement with parents will tend to reduce student support for demonstrations because of the strong linkages between these items.

Summary

If the structure of student attitudes remains constant, 1974 will see an increase of student support for leftist causes. A new factor, and one that may change the attitudinal structure somewhat, is the declining level of disagreement between parents and students. Since disagreement with parents is closely related with support for demonstrations, declining disagreement with parents suggests that an increase in support among students for leftist causes may not be associated with the traditional forms of student activism.

Table 1. Comparison of two universities to a national sample.

	University of Oregon, March 1970. N = 312	National sample Yankelovich, 1971. N = 1244	Arizonal State University, March 1973, N = 409
Political preference:			
Conservative	16%	21%*	40% 38
Middle	-	16	-
Liberal	84%	63	60 62
	100%	100%	100%
Political party:			
Republican	16*	21	36 36
Democratic	32	36	40 36
YAF	4	-	-
SDS	7	-	-
Other	9	6	3 02
None	32	37	21 26 + 10
Reason for college:			
Career	29*	56	68 71
Other, intangible	64	44	32 26
Undecided	7	-	-
View of government:			
Democratic	45*	42	49 42
" in name only	55	58	51 58
Political action outside the party system will be ineffective:			
Agree	17	-	37 36
Undecided	19	-	24 30
Disagree	64	-	39 33
Ever demonstrated against U.S. military policy?			
Never	57%	-	75
Once or more	43	-	25
The productivity of the corporate system outweighs its disadvantages:			
Agree	25	-	39 42
Undecided	29	-	21 24
Disagree	46	-	39 33
Demonstrations are effective in mobilizing public opinion in support of an issue:			
Agree	48	-	53 62
Undecided	19	-	13 12
Disagree	33	-	33 26

Table 1 continued.

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Experience is more valuable than knowledge:				
	Agree	43	-	58
	Undecided	25	-	20
	Disagree	32	-	22
Science has its place, but there are many things which the human intellect can never understand:				
	Agree	47	-	64 58
	Undecided	12	-	9 9
	Disagree	41	-	27 32
Astrology may predict a person's future:				
	Agree	9	-	15 15
	Undecided	15	-	17 20
	Disagree	76	-	68 65
I would like to live in a rural area:				
	Agree	-	43*	63
	Undecided	-	13	13
	Disagree	-	44	24

31 No one - planned
43 - wld go
26 - no
a few might + like

Present time - 61 yes
23 no
16 no op

Table 2. Items used in both factor analyses.

The ASU version of the item is in (). A minus sign indicates the item must be reversed in order to understand the correlation. E.G. -conservatism = liberalism.

1. Liberalism.
2. Disagreement with parents with respect to political matters.
3. Hard work gets you ahead.
4. Estimated per cent who have (would) demonstrated against U.S. military policy.
5. Number of times respondent has demonstrated against U.S. military policy.
6. Perceived dissimilarity in attitudes to other students.
7. Political action outside the party system is effective.
8. Aside from pollution, the quality of life has not been damaged by the corporate system.
9. Woman's liberation (ERA) will produce constructive changes.
10. -Social change has occured so rapidly that history may not provide guidance in the future.
11. -Economic interests influence political ideas.
12. -Science provides no guidance in political conflicts.
13. -Astrology may predict a person's future.
14. -There are many things the human intellect cannot understand.
15. Productivity of the corporate system does not outweigh its disadvantages.
16. Demonstrations are effective in mobilizing public opinion in support of an issue.
17. Knowledge is more valuable than experience.
18. All groups do not equally participate in running our country. (Our system is democratic in name only)
19. A few people at the top run the country. (Big businessmen really run the government).
20. The main purpose of the university is not to prepare for a career. (College has intangible benefits.)

Figure 1
Plot of the first two factors, varimax rotation.

University of Oregon, March 1970
N = 312

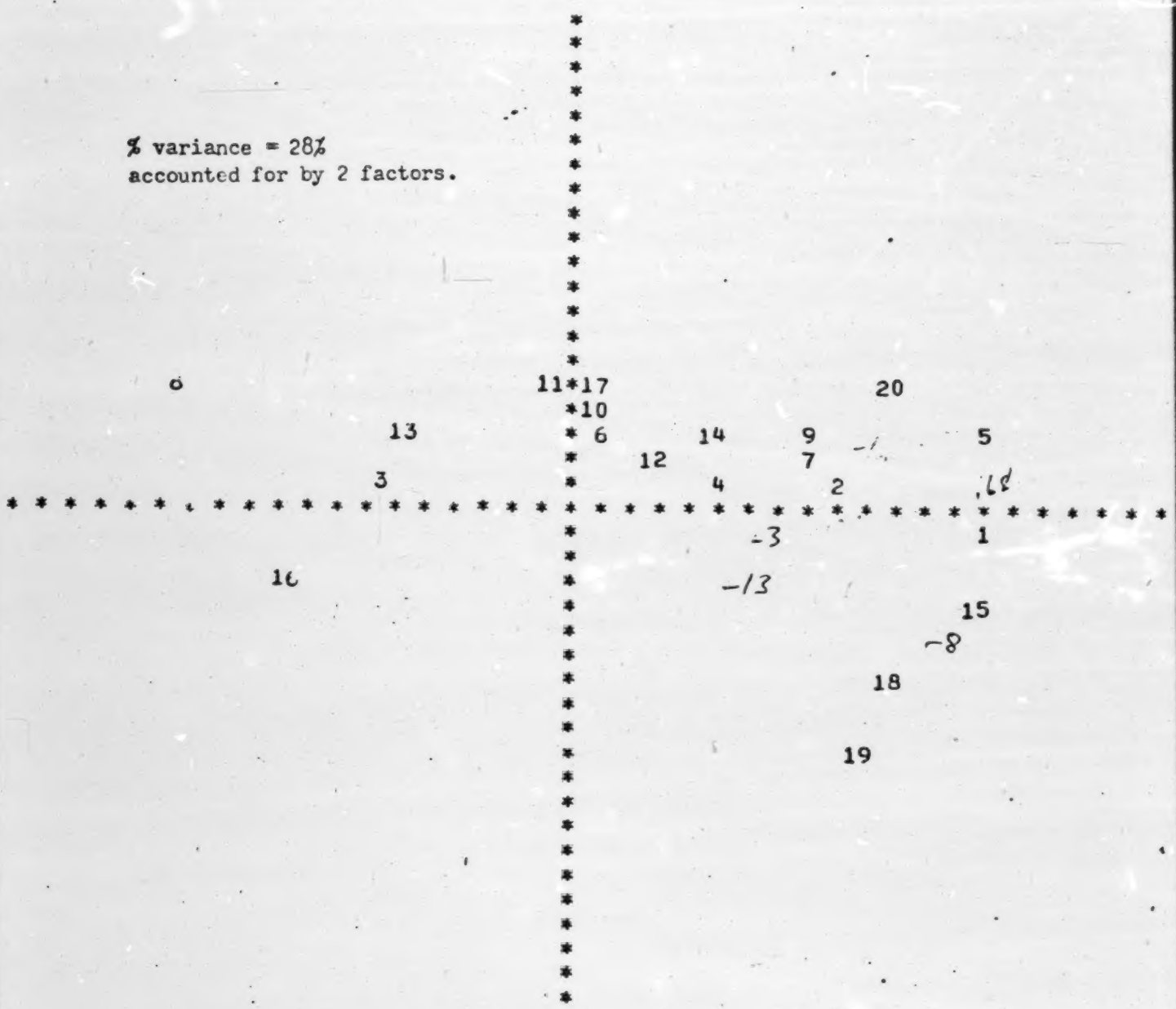
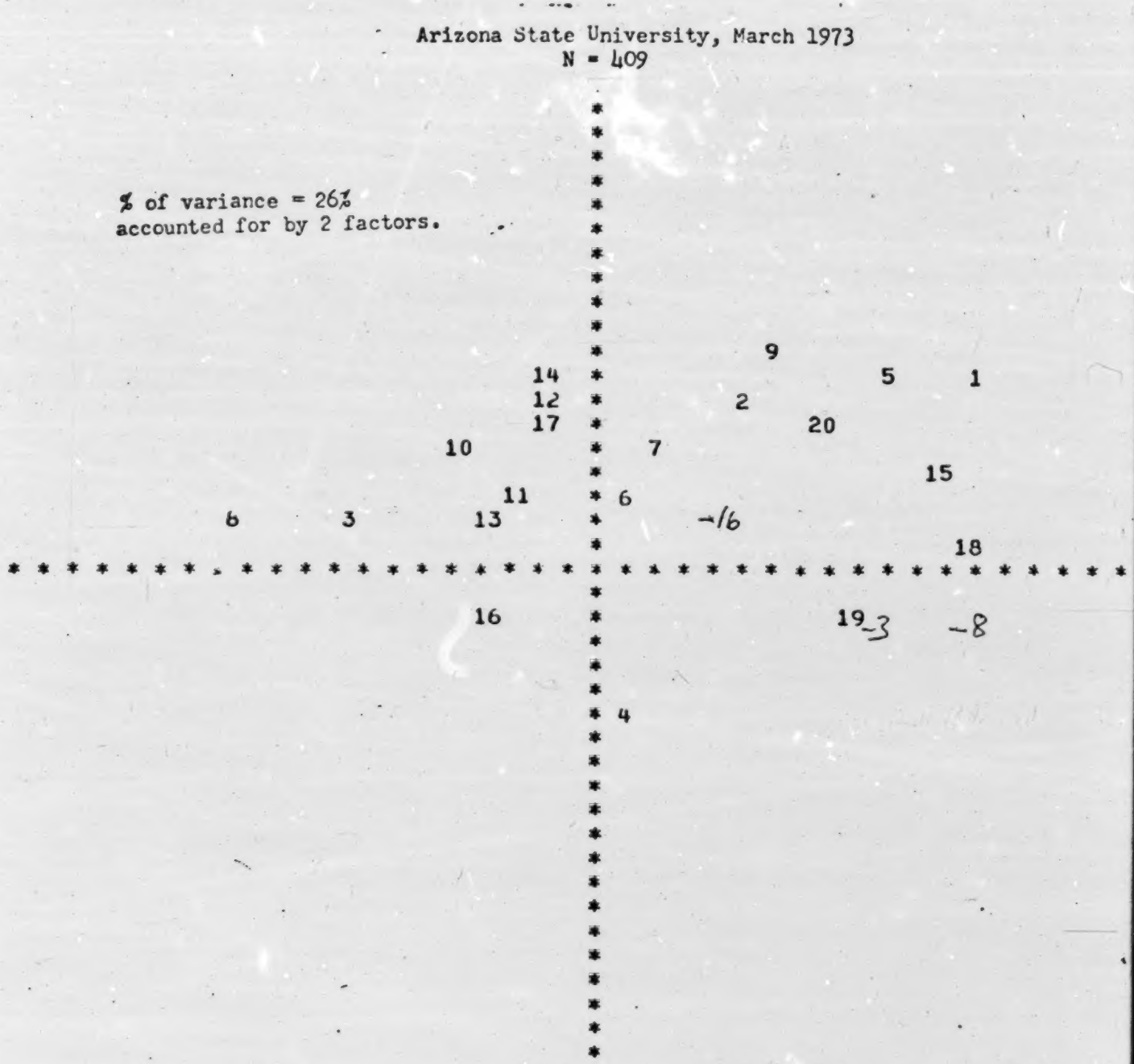


Figure 2
Plot of the first two factors, varimax rotation.



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